

Child helplines during COVID-19

Voice of Children, Nepal

Introduction

Voice of Children has been working throughout Kathmandu and the eastern region of Nepal since 2000 to support children living on the street to reintegrate back into their families and communities. Like many other countries around the world, Nepal entered into a lockdown in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although nationwide restrictions were lifted at the end of June, several local lockdowns were again imposed in August due to increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases. The restrictions have had a major impact on poor and vulnerable families who were dependent on the daily wage of informal work to survive. Whilst Voice of Children was forced to stop its group activities in communities, it was able instead to focus on providing food and other relief packages to local families. It was also able to continue operating its helpline, which provided vital support.



The programme

In 2007, the Government of Nepal gave approval to NGOs to set up helplines in coordination with the Ministry of Women, Children and Senior Citizens. The national, toll-free helpline, '1098', is now active in 12 different locations, operated by different NGOs with central coordination from the government, and is accessible in all of Nepal's 77 districts. Since 2016, Voice of Children has been running a helpline 1098 in Province 1 in eastern Nepal. It receives calls from across ten different districts.

The government requires that all NGOs operate the helpline in accordance with set guidelines, which involve being able to provide a full service, including emergency rescue, trained counsellors, psycho-social and legal support, family reintegration capacity and a strong coordination network with local agencies and service providers. All NGO helpline operators must report to the government each month with the number of calls received, the number of cases of children rescued from abuse and the number of referrals made.

Implementation

Helpline 1098 operates for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Providing this constant service requires at least eight Voice of Children staff: two telephone operators, a manager, nurse or first aid-trained member of staff, a psycho-social support counsellor, two social workers and an office assistant. People call helpline 1098 both for advice or counselling and to report child protection violations or cases of child abuse. Where advice or counselling is required, Voice of Children's trained staff and social workers are on hand to speak with the caller. If calls relate to cases of child abuse, Voice of Children acts as a mediator by coordinating with the police. Its staff and social workers accompany the police to visit children in order to ensure that child protection procedures are followed and that the police approach is 'child-friendly'. Voice of Children runs a temporary shelter where children who need to be rescued are brought to stay for a maximum of three months.

More than 70 per cent of calls to the helpline are from adults reporting incidents of child abuse in schools and homes or reporting that children are being made to work in factories, and

नेपाल सरकार
महिला बालबालिका तथा समाज कल्याण मन्त्रालय,
केन्द्रीय बालकल्याण समितिबाट अनुमति प्राप्त

VOICE OF CHILDREN
2051

भ्वाईस अफ चिल्ड्रेनद्वारा सञ्चालित
बालबालिकाको आपत्कालिन उद्धार, राहून, संरक्षण तथा परामर्श सेवाका लागि
बाल हेल्पलाइन
पैसा नलाग्ने फोन
१०९८
Toll Free No.
1098

यदि तपाईंको समुदायमा,

- बालबालिका सडक तथा परिवारविहीन अवस्थामा बसेका छन्,
- बालबालिका हराएका, अलपत्र तथा वेवारिसे अवस्थामा फेला परेका छन्,
- बालबालिकालाई शारीरिक दण्ड, सजाय तथा दुर्व्यवहार भएको छ,
- बालबालिकालाई यौन दुर्व्यवहार तथा शोषण भएको छ,
- बालबालिकालाई श्रम शोषण तथा अन्य जोखिम काममा लगाइएको छ,
- बालबालिका अनलाइन-इन्टरनेट मार्फत दुर्व्यवहारमा परेका छन्,
- बालविवाह हुन लागेको अथवा भएको छ,
- बालबालिकाको ओसारपसार हुन लागेको छ,
- बालबालिकालाई मनोसामाजिक तथा कानुनी परामर्श र सहयोग चाहिएको छ र अन्य कुनै पनि बालअधिकार उल्लङ्घनका घटनाहरु थाहा पाउनु भएको छ भने

नि:शुल्क फोन नं. १०९८ मा जानकारी गराउनुहोस् र बाल हेल्पलाइनबाट सम्बन्धीत निकाय तथा संस्थाहरुको सहयोग र समन्वयमा आवश्यक सेवाहरु उपलब्ध हुनेछन् ।

सहकार्य



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How
we
care

By practitioners,
for practitioners.

requests from parents for financial support to look after their children. During the COVID-19 pandemic there has been an increase in calls from people requesting support for food. On average, Voice of Children deals with 12-15 cases per month, but during COVID-19 this figure has increased by around 20 per cent. Many calls to the helpline during lockdown have related to child abuse, with an average of ten calls per month on the issue of child marriage, which have been referred on to the police.

Successfully operating the helpline, including promoting it and providing services around the issues that callers raise, requires multi-sector coordination. Voice of Children is part of a committee that includes representatives from local government, police, health care providers, other NGOs, journalists, schools and lawyers' associations.

A helpline will only have impact if people are aware of it. Voice of Children promotes its helpline in a variety of different ways. Staff and volunteers deliver workshops in local schools to raise awareness with children about child protection, their rights and how to recognise abuse. These workshops usually include a demonstration of how to use the real helpline so that children are aware of what to expect and to instil them with confidence should they need to call. Other promotional materials and activities include stickers for each child with the telephone number printed on them, a leaflet for children to take home to their parents, training for teachers and community volunteers, and promotion over the radio.

Outcomes

- Operating the helpline as part of a multi-sector coordinating group builds good relationships with other stakeholders, bringing mutual benefits at local level, including with other NGOs and national government. One such example is that Voice of Children now provides child protection training to the local municipality, improving the way that children are supported in various settings.
- Helpline 1098 has created a safe and protective place for child rights violations to be shared and it has the capacity to coordinate and provide a comprehensive child protection service.

Challenges faced

- Dealing with issues of child abuse and child marriage in communities can be difficult given the sensitive nature of claims and has at times resulted in threats to staff members. (This situation has improved over time as awareness and understanding of the helpline and the work of Voice of Children has grown.)
- Whilst the multi-sector stakeholder coordination referred to above is a positive outcome, it can also be challenging and slow moving.

Resources required

- On average, the government provides 5,000 USD toward the helpline each year. Voice of Children must source the additional funds themselves, which total around 50,000 USD. These funds enable the operation of the helpline and the wraparound support of running the child care centre with trained staff, social workers, nurses and counsellors. In addition, there are costs for renting a vehicle, which is necessary for follow up visits relating to child abuse and for rescuing children where necessary.

Top tips

1

Establish a good network and coordination with government agencies – especially police, municipal child protection committee, lawyers, etc.

2

Be prepared to respond to emergency calls at any time of the day and in all circumstances – even at midnight when it's raining!

3

Develop the resilience to stand up to child abusers.

4

Be sure to follow the rules and regulations regarding child protection in your country.

CONTACT DETAILS

Find out more about Voice of Children at www.familyforeverychild.org/voice-of-children or contact Raju Ghimire, Deputy Director raju@voiceofchildren.org.np



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